

Title: Preaching the Gospel
Biblical Text: Romans 15:18-21
Teaching Series: Justified by Love
Preaching Date: October 8, 2023
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Romans 15:18-21

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”

What many modern people find unsettling about following Jesus is that at some point we realize, he's not interested in fulfilling our desires. Christianity is not simply one of many ways to make your dreams and achieve the good life. It's widely presumed that we all seek fulfillment and happiness. Some may choose to find that fulfillment through work. Others in their family. And some, like us, find it in religion in general and Jesus in particular.

Most Chicagoans are good with *personal* Lord.

But we're unsettled by a *universal* Lord.

However, we have to be so careful. This is a way we become, as pastor Eugene Peterson puts it, "*so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking*" (Romans 12:2, MSG). *Is Jesus really one of many ways people can find fulfillment? I think this is what we all realize as we learn to live life with Jesus: God is not about fulfilling our purposes, he's about fulfilling his through us.* The psalmist celebrates that, *Read Psalm 138:8 ... "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me."* To be sure, we may have initially come to faith as a way to find peace or comfort or meaning, but we soon realize that God has drawn us to himself, forgiven our sin and failings, and is presently at work through his Spirit in order to bring about his good, pleasing, and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

This is what Paul has come to understand. As a person who once looked to religion as a source of meaning and social power, Paul soon realized, as we'll read today, his *ambition ... what Christ has accomplished* in him ... is to fulfill "*the ministry of the gospel of Christ*" (v.19). Now, at first blush this may seem like a calling unique to ministry professional or professors or pastors. But I want to suggest that what Paul lays out in our passage today is not a calling of ministry but rather a calling for humanity. That's what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about why it's every Christian's calling to preach the gospel.

Here's how we'll organize our time together ...

- The **words** of the gospel. Or we might ask, *what's the gospel's content or nature?*
- The **deeds** of the gospel. *What's it mean to obey the gospel?*
- The **power** of the gospel. *Or, what's the effect or demonstration of the gospel? What's it look like?*

[Prayer]

Movement 1: The Word of the Gospel (vv.15-21)

Along with our modern understanding of the good life comes with a disdain for postalizing. Our friends and neighbors may say, *well Jesus is good for you or someone like you, but I find meaning, fulfillment, and happiness another way through my family and work or something else.* This kind of moral customization may seem really humble ... and generously tolerant. And so it causes us to not speak the gospel. It causes us to keep our words to ourselves. *Right?* Yet, this is not at all how Paul viewed his calling.

Look at v.18. ***Read Romans 15:18 ... For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience.*** Okay, so Paul believed God had done something through him. He had changed his life through the good news; Paul met Jesus face-to-face on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). And his purpose in life is directly connected to this experience. He says, *I won't talk about anything except what Jesus has accomplished in me.* You see that? Paul explains something so critical for us to understand as followers

of Jesus in Chicago. He says, yes Jesus has personally changed my life. But just because it's personal doesn't mean it's not universal too. In fact, the personal nature of his experience causes him to speak to others about the gospel. And he doesn't just share the gospel with people whom we might expect. Paul's unique calling is to bring good news to non-Jewish people ... a diverse and pluralistic society with varying degrees of religious history.

Church, if you've personally experienced the grace, mercy, and love of Jesus' good news then it should compel you and I to share this good news with others.

Specifically says this, as he gives us a framework to think about preaching the gospel. *Read Romans 15:18-19a ... For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience — by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.* Paul is bringing the singular good news to a diverse people in three ways. The first is through word.

What's the word of the gospel?

Well as we've considered throughout Paul's letter, the gospel is fundamentally a message. It's good news. It's an announcement. The core composition of the gospel is ...

- Jesus *lived* historically.
- Jesus *died* sacrificially.

- Jesus was *buried* literally.
- Jesus *rose* victoriously.
- Jesus *ascended* authoritatively.

Together the gospel can be summarized as the singular announcement that contradicted the "good news" of the day that Caesar was Lord ... the gospel announcement is that *Jesus is Lord!* You see, this is a personal word with universal implications. Jesus is Lord, not Caesar. Caesar ... nor government ... nor prestige ... nor wealth ... nor social power are simply different possible pathways to a good life. Jesus is Lord regardless of our awareness. And the calling of his kingdom people is to share with our words his good news.

Movement 2: The Deed of the Gospel (v.19, 2

Thessalonians 5:8b, Matthew 11:29)

We don't simply speak the gospel as a message, but we obey the gospel in our deeds. Notice Paul says, *Read Romans 15:19a ... by word and deed.* You see, the gospel is not simply something to talk about, the gospel is an invitation to life as God intends. If we were to read the Bible cover-to-cover we would walk away and say to ourselves, *I've got a story to share.* But we would also say, *I need to live differently.* This dichotomy is what splits conservative and progressive Christian churches. While conservatives are often all about getting out doctrinal truths right, progressive churches are often focused on living with love toward their neighbors. But the gospel is both—it's word and deed.

In 2 Thessalonians Paul explains the devastating implication of missing the deed of the gospel. He says that judgement will come to those, ***Read 2 Thessalonians 5:8b ... who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*** What could he mean by this? Well, while Jesus is our Savior he is also our supreme example. And so, in every movement of the gospel storyline we find instruction. When we believe his message we are expected to perform his deeds. Jesus himself said, ***Read Matthew 11:29 ... Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*** Resting in the Lord is not about doing nothing. Resting in the Lord is about doing nothing but what he does. He says, learn from me.

- We're supposed to *live* like him.
- We're supposed to *die* to ourselves like him.
- We're supposed to identify with his *burial* through baptism.
- We're supposed to *rise* above the powers of Satan, sin, and death through a life of holiness.
- We're supposed to live like he is on an *ascended* throne, because he is.

You see? This gospel is not simply talk. The gospel is inhabited by God's people ... as both evidence of our faith and as witness to those around us about the beauty and truth of the good news. We don't just say he's Lord we live as if he is Lord. In fact, if we don't live as if he is Lord but say it ... we're hypocrites (Matthew 23). And if we live as if he's Lord but don't say it ... we're cowards (Matthew 10:33).

Preaching the gospel is about what we say. But preaching the gospel is also about what we do.

Movement 3: The Power of the Gospel (vv.19b-21)

Now, if the gospel were word and deed we'd still have a pretty self-involved faith. It would still be a bit of a personal reality but not a universal one. In our passage Paul is not simply focused on himself and his ministry. He's also calling our attention to the power of the gospel ... its effect in the society and world around him. *Read Romans 15:19b-21 ... so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."* Paul is saying something. Paul is doing something. But Paul is also witnessing something.

Preaching the gospel then is not jus about word and dead, but it's about power. Did you see that in v.19? *Read Romans 15:19a ... by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.* By the power of the Spirit the gospel is spreading and bringing fruit in places that had no business being transformed by the God of the Bible. They didn't believe. They didn't have history. They had every reason to say, that's good for you and yours but we've got our own traditions and beliefs.